

# Taking the Initiative

Activities to Enhance Effectiveness & Promote Fun



J. P. Witman

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by  
**J. P. Witman**

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# Acknowledgments

This book has been a work in progress for the last 45 years—from Camp Swatara where, as an 11-year-old, the mixers and cooperative games (along with cutthroat 4-square games, a few Copperhead snake hunts, and selected verses from Revelation) distracted me from homesickness—to Teambuilders where, as a 56-year-old, I employ a four-decades old bag of tricks to dazzle and amaze (or at least survive) participating treatment, school, church, and corporate seekers of fun and enhanced function. Along the way I've been blessed with some contacts of consequence in developing an approach to initiatives and teambuilding. They include:

**The Easter Seal Crew.** The ultimate 24/7 experience. Limited staff + very limited dollars = some creative special events and activities. One highlight was the conversion of the path around the flagpole area into the largest lap sit in the history of Somerset, PA.

**Stan and the Gang at Hamburg State School.** Trips to the “Games Preserve” of Bernie DeCoven and the realization that cooperation could be as engaging as competition. Stan leading a hug/a slug and everyone getting messed up when the two commands got to the same person from opposite directions at the same time. It's not easy to simultaneously hug and slug.

**University of Oregon.** New Games workshops and an introduction to problem-solving initiatives from classmate Steve Carlson. Steve used the ancient desks in one of the ancient buildings as the islands, or stepping stones, for the class' blindfolded journey from one wall to the other.

**Gary and Camp Allen.** Developing sequences of initiatives for various groups and integrating them into education curricula. How many scavenger hunt variations are there?

**Nancy and Eastern Cooperative Recreation.** Games, games, games with concern for inclusiveness and maximizing fun. First exposure to passing a squeeze and lining up by the heights of our animals (from ant to giraffe).

**Kelly and Mike.** Students who became employees and developed a phenomenal initiatives progression for adolescents. Great processing stuff, including The Knots of Intention, which some participants would hold on to for years.

**Roland and Associates.** A dose of assessment and processing to heighten the impact of activities. All aboards on any object big enough for two people to get up on.

**Project Adventure, Inc.** Exemplary workshops and materials. Ending up going the wrong direction on a group move (everyone moving with eyes closed) and stopping just short of the Jersey Turnpike.

**Adventure Challenge Experience at Philhaven, which has become Teambuilders, Inc.** Diverse groups and the opportunity to practice, practice, practice. How many initiatives can you come up with for the styrofoam covered with duct tape objects we call stones?

**Creative Learning, Inc.** Exposure to the corporate approach. The power of a standing ovation and a participating CEO.

**Mary Strickler Sarver.** The greatest influence of all, however, was my great aunt. Full of stories of life in Asia, Europe, and all across the US, her work in the Recreation Service of the American Red Cross was an inspiration. She embraced the challenges of making sad people a little happier, discouraged people a little more hopeful, lonely folks feel more connected, and transforming the “I won't” attitude into the “I'll try.” She and her Red Cross colleagues were implementing “New Games and Initiatives” years before they became trendy.

Acknowledging the work of others has *not* been a strong point in the literature of initiatives and cooperative games. Many activities appear in different sources without attribution. The roots of many activities are difficult to discern. Early versions of particular activities appear in diverse and obscure sources: Canadian military training manuals, extension service “How To’s,” camp training materials, American Red Cross recreation primers, Eastern Cooperative Recreation School Notebooks and so forth. Nevertheless, I’ll try to recognize the history of the activities and ideas I’ve shared in this booklet as accurately as possible. I realize that this section is probably something only the slightly obsessed reader will peruse, and thus I’ve thrown in some resource material that will hopefully make it worth the effort!

The picture on the copyright page is me. I recall it being taken at the Mosemann Studio in Manheim, PA. My dad, who was not thrilled with the whole ambiance of professional photography, was delighted when I told Mr. Mosemann that his studio looked like a pig pen.

For more information on the frames of reference presented in Section 1, check out the websites associated with them. Go to [www.pecosriver.com](http://www.pecosriver.com) for more information on the T.A.S.T.E. model. I got to assist with a Pecos River training program, and here I had the opportunity to see first-hand how the T.A.S.T.E. concepts and the “Play To Win” philosophy were integrated into experiential activities. Their distinctive trust fall (catchers have their arms above their heads) left an impression—a case of something working but you weren’t sure why and how!

More information on the Hardiness model is available at [www.HardinessInstitute.com](http://www.HardinessInstitute.com), where you can do a personal hardiness assessment, contrasting your stress vulnerability factors with your stress resistance resources. I came out as walking a very high wire with a very small safety net—an eye opener!

The scales presented in Section 2 come from a variety of sources. I developed the “Co-Participant Checklist” with clients in Philhaven’s Day Treatment Program, and it has proven useful with a variety of groups. The “Rate Your Team” scale is from the Customer Driven Leadership materials of Ted Anders and Beverly Fisher. The “High Performance Team Assessment” is from Roland and Associates. I developed the “Cooperation and Trust” scale. It has been refined by and is available from Idyll Arbor, Inc. The other sources are mentioned in the text with exception of “Process Considerations.” This came from an adventure program for adolescents developed by Mike Denmeade and Kelly Pinard at Hampstead Hospital, which, in turn, reflects the training they did with Pam Kerr and Mike Gass at The University of New Hampshire.

With the activities section, it’s nearly impossible to ascertain exact ownership. Many are activities I developed for groups that I ran; some are from the adventure literature listed in the resource section, and those activities with clear lineage include:

- Alaskan Baseball—from the Meeting Children’s Needs Through Movement Activities curriculum of Marianne Torbert
- Captain’s Orders—Cradlerock Group workshop
- Fast Lineup and Instant Replay—New Games books and workshops
- Goals Call, Group Move, Tower of Feetsa, and Speedy Animals—Project Adventure books and workshops
- Let Go...—from the recovery program at Hampstead Hospital
- Communication Puzzle—from Julie Saville
- Dates—from Brian Miller’s Team-Building Activities
- How Many Squares? and Mapping—from Reid Smalley’s thesis
- Ranks—list of common words is from Gary Kroehnert’s 100 Training Games
- Goal Setting and Values Contract—from Mike Denmeade and Kelly Pinard’s adventure curriculum
- The Garden of Your Business—from a workshop by Susan Newell
- Why Ask Why—from a workshop by Lynn and Gregg Hedden
- You Make the Call—from a presentation by Dana Shakarchy

Contact for the Body Part Debriefing is [www.training-wheels.com](http://www.training-wheels.com). They have a variety of other products too. The alternatives to verbal debriefing came from a workshop presentation by Susan Potts. Finally my company picnic story was originally published in *Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks* magazine.

People are resources, too. Collectively the folks listed below represent the ideal initiatives/games leader. I realize that the people below will not all be familiar to readers. Consider the characteristics though and folks you have worked with who exemplify them.

The sparkle in the eye of **Chris Roland**

The concern for individual needs of **Sara Marques**

The sense of humor of **Bill Klinger**

The passion of **Bob Raynor**

The repertoire of activities of **Karl Rohnke**

The energy of **Deb Brockman**

The playfulness of **Ken Yoder**

The creativity of **Karen Preskenis**

The ability to adapt on the fly of **Jim Cain**

The integrity of **Nancy Penney**

The persistence of **Diane Williams**

The preparation of **Dennis Mellott**

The resilience of **Ida Carvell**

The ability to motivate of **Gary Nussbaum**

The presence of **Tom Smith**

The enthusiasm of **Melissa McHugh**

Special thanks to the folks above and to the many other group leaders I've had the opportunity to work with and learn from. Thanks as well to the many different groups I've worked with—they have kept me humble and appreciative of the power of cooperative experiences. Finally, but most importantly, to Kathryn, Martha and the rest of my supportive family—I love you and love being loved by you.





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# Introduction

Initiatives are activities that require group effort to accomplish tasks. They are often synergistic, where the performance of the group exceeds what any single group member could accomplish alone. Initiatives can serve the dual purpose of providing engaging, enjoyable experiences while promoting both individual and collective growth and development. Participants can experience recreation while reflecting on their competence as a group (and as a group member) and developing strategies for enhanced effectiveness. Initiatives that are well-matched to skills and needs of particular groups can promote enhanced communication, cooperation, and collaboration. Nelson (1999) identified the following ways in which an individual can take greater initiative in his or her job. Each is relevant to the presentation, implementation and evaluation of initiatives:

- Thinking outside the box. This relates to the novelty of many initiatives. Groups are involved in tasks that they have no experience to rely on and are asked to consider new approaches, to brainstorm and to champion new ideas.
- Doing your homework. Preparation is the key to success with many initiatives. Groups learn to fully utilize the planning time they are given in the process of completing an initiative.
- Taking action—capitalizing on opportunities. Group members are encouraged to take chances and to make decisions. They are also asked to take responsibility for their actions.
- Making improvements. With many initiatives there are multiple trials with the opportunity for group members to suggest alternatives and refinements toward enhanced performance.
- Persevering. Sticking with the ideas and actions you believe in is a part of the process of many initiatives as is the collective will of a group to keep trying when success is not easily or quickly obtained.

Initiatives are useful for helping groups get to know one another and have fun together. They can be presented and sequenced to work on goals related to team-building, education, and/or treatment. Skills and attitudes developed through initiatives can potentially transfer to all areas of participants' lives.

The intent of this book is to present a frame of reference for and the content and process of utilizing initiatives. Section 1 provides several models of human behavior which are particularly relevant to developing a rationale and frame of reference for presenting initiatives. Section 2 looks at group and individual assessment, goal setting, and selection of activities to meet goals. In Section 3 a variety of initiatives are detailed, while Section 4 focuses on processing the initiatives. Section 5 is a brief collection of resources, notes, and anecdotes. Be on the lookout throughout the booklet for some "Points of Reference"—quotes of note which accentuate key points related to utilizing initiatives in group work. The essence of this book is expressed in the following lines from Sondheim and Lapine's "Into The Woods."

## *NO ONE IS ALONE*

*So it's  
Into the woods  
You go again,  
You have to  
Every now and then,  
Into the woods,  
No telling when  
Be ready for the journey.*

*The way is dark,  
The light is dim,  
But now there's you,  
Me, her and him.  
The chances look small,  
The choices look grim,  
But everything you learn there  
Will help when you return there.*

*Into the woods—  
You have to grope,  
But that's the way  
You learn to cope.  
Into the woods  
To find there's hope  
Of getting through the journey.*

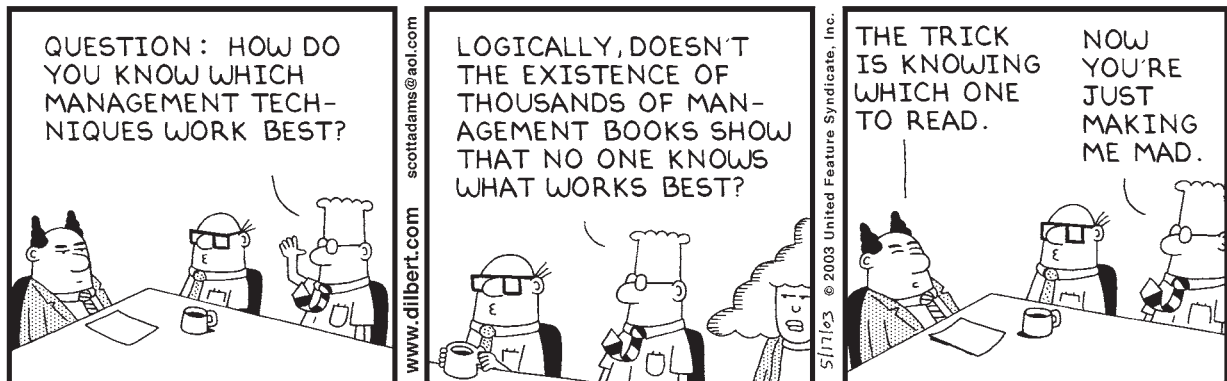
Another important frame of reference is the philosophy attributed to the late, great Pirates baseball star Willie Stargell: “Everybody Is Somebody!” Initiatives are not about watching others do something. They are about getting everyone involved in the doing and the accomplishing.

## Reference

Nelson, B. (1999). Taking initiative: The options are endless. Retrieved on December 26, 2007 from <http://www.inc.com/articles>

The author and publisher caution the professional to be sensitive to the abilities and limitations of the participants. The nature of some activities may not be appropriate for your clients. Professional judgment on your part is required.

# Section 1: Toward a Frame of Reference



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While it's scary to agree with the pointy-haired boss (as those of you who read the strip regularly realize he's seldom on the bright side of arguments!), there seems to be some management perspectives that make a lot of sense when considering performance enhancement. Two models worth reading about are presented in the sections which follow.

The T.A.S.T.E. model developed by Aon Consulting (Wilson, 2007) exemplifies the optimal values and behaviors of high performing teams and organizations. "High Performance" is often defined as clarity with:

- Objectives, knowing where you want to go;
- Structure, determining roles and responsibilities; and
- Strategy, having a plan that the team agrees upon.

The characteristics/ideals of the T.A.S.T.E. model include:

**Truth**—Telling the truth to yourself in order to tell the truth to others. Choices with this concept include assertiveness over passiveness and openness over secretiveness.

**Accountability**—The ability to choose how you respond to events and the willingness to live with and learn from the results of your choices. This means avoiding blaming others or citing circumstances when interpreting unfavorable outcomes.

**Support**—Encouraging each others' personal and professional growth, not just for the good of the team, but for the good of each other. Actions include providing others with information, empathy, and honest feedback/critique. It also means actually helping them do things at times.

**Trust**—Trusting yourself and your inner wisdom. Then, trusting that your team members have your best interests at heart. A key choice with this construct is delegating rather than hoarding responsibility.

**Energy**—Having access to and control over the emotional energy required to respond optimally to life's opportunities. Persistence and passion are the signs of this.

The scale which follows provides an opportunity to rate your organization/team on these characteristics. The activities section of this booklet is indexed by the potential for an activity to develop and practice these characteristics.

## Organizational Issues Assessment

Use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement with the statements below:

Strongly Disagree= 0      Somewhat Disagree= 1

Somewhat Agree= 2      Strongly Agree= 3

### People in this organization:

- \_\_\_A. Say what they mean and mean what they say
- \_\_\_B. Are willing to live with and learn from the results of their choices
- \_\_\_C. Encourage each others' personal and professional growth
- \_\_\_D. Trust that others have their best interests at heart
- \_\_\_E. Have lots of passion and enthusiasm
- \_\_\_F. Lack energy for taking on challenges and opportunities
- \_\_\_G. Are hesitant to delegate responsibilities
- \_\_\_H. Seldom offer empathy and support to others
- \_\_\_I. Lack a sense of accountability for their actions
- \_\_\_J. Stretch or bend the truth
- \_\_\_K. Are more often assertive than passive or aggressive
- \_\_\_L. Have a sense of empowerment due to the belief that their actions matter
- \_\_\_M. Help each other with tasks and problems
- \_\_\_N. Have faith in the decisions of others
- \_\_\_O. Cope well with stress

**Truth**                      **A**\_\_\_ + **K**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_ - **J**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**Accountability**            **B**\_\_\_ + **L**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_ - **I**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**Support**                    **C**\_\_\_ + **M**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_ - **H**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**Trust**                      **D**\_\_\_ + **N**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_ - **G**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**Energy**                    **E**\_\_\_ + **O**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_ - **F**\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Kobassa's (Maddi & Kobassa, 1984) "Hardiness" model is also worth considering in regard to personal goals. The "Hardiness" model relates to a constellation of attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral tendencies that allow people to survive, and even thrive in response to stress. Components include:

Control—Having a sense of empowerment. Making choices and assuming leadership and responsibility.

Commitment—Having some passion for things beyond oneself. Developing affiliations with ideals, organizations, and people.

Challenge—Viewing change not as a threat but rather as an opportunity for growth. Getting out of your comfort zone by attempting new experiences.

The scale on p. 4 provides an opportunity for self-assessment regarding these characteristics. Participation in initiatives and cooperative activities affords the opportunity to experience and practice them.

## **Point of Reference #1**

**A notion of the dedication and courage change requires:**

*True commitment*

*begins when we*

*reach the point*

*of not knowing*

*how we can*

*possibly go on,*

*and decide to do it*

*anyway!*



## Lifestyle Hardiness Scale

Use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement with the statements below:

0 = strongly disagree    1 = mildly disagree    2 = mildly agree    3 = strongly agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. Trying my best at activities makes a difference.
- \_\_\_\_\_ B. Trusting fate is sometimes all I can do in a relationship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ C. I often wake up eager to start the day's projects.
- \_\_\_\_\_ D. Thinking of myself as a free person leads to great frustration and difficulty.
- \_\_\_\_\_ E. I would be willing to sacrifice financial security in my life if something really challenging came along.
- \_\_\_\_\_ F. It bothers me when I have to deviate from the routine or schedule I've set for myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ G. An average citizen can have an impact on the political process.
- \_\_\_\_\_ H. Without the right breaks, it is difficult to be successful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I. I know why I'm doing what I'm doing in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ J. Getting close to people puts me at risk of being obligated to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ K. Encountering new situations is an important priority in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ L. I really don't mind when I have nothing to do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ M. "Passionate" describes my commitment to many activities in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ N. I can control my responses to the actions of others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ O. I enjoy activities which stretch my abilities to the limit.

### Scoring

Control:       $\frac{\quad}{A} + \frac{\quad}{G} + \frac{\quad}{N}$  minus  $\frac{\quad}{B} + \frac{\quad}{H} = \underline{\quad}$

Commitment:       $\frac{\quad}{C} + \frac{\quad}{I} + \frac{\quad}{M}$  minus  $\frac{\quad}{D} + \frac{\quad}{J} = \underline{\quad}$

Challenge:       $\frac{\quad}{E} + \frac{\quad}{K} + \frac{\quad}{O}$  minus  $\frac{\quad}{F} + \frac{\quad}{L} = \underline{\quad}$

HARDINESS = Control + Commitment + Challenge = \_\_\_\_\_

(Note: The numbers generated by the Lifestyle Hardiness Scale allow individuals to compare their personal strength of belief among the three components and to compare their total score to the scores of others.)

Another model, which includes elements of both the T.A.S.T.E. and Hardiness considerations, for assessing team functioning is Lencioni's "Five Dysfunctions of a Team." These include the following dysfunctions:

- absence of trust
- fear of conflict
- lack of commitment
- avoidance of accountability
- inattention to results.

Lencioni (2002) provides an assessment of these characteristics which teams can utilize to ascertain strengths and weaknesses.

## References

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